



GUEST EDITORIAL

Winning the Battle of Soldier Hollow

After losing the Battle of Snowbasin, the Air Force could win the Battle of Soldier Hollow

Keith Baker, Guest Editorialist

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Here's the plot so far: The US Air Force has for ages had a small lodge at the base of Snowbasin Ski Resort on US government property—National Forest Land. Earl Holding, owner of Snowbasin Ski Resort and the second richest man in Utah, kicked the Air Force out last year.

Wait a minute, you say—the US Air Force? The guys who fly from Ogden halfway around the world to bomb Saddam and Kosovo into submission were evicted from US government property by a guy who pumps gas for a living? Yes indeed. That was what happened.

How does a gas pump jockey rout the Air Force when Iraq and Yugoslavia can't even shoot down one Air Force plane in war? To paraphrase President Bill Clinton, "It's the money, stupid."

Take a look at how much Saddam or the Kosovo Serbs donated to Orrin Hatch, and compare that to what Earl Holding gave. That's how you beat the US Air Force—buy Orrin Hatch.

Earl Holding, a few bucks short of a billionaire, owns Snowbasin, a dumpy little local ski area, but Mr. Holding thinks big. He wants Snowbasin to be the next Vail. Civic-spirited Mr. Holding joined SLOC early on, and talked his buddies on SLOC into designating Snowbasin as the venue for the premier Olympic ski event—the downhill.

No matter that Snowbasin had no run that could be used for a downhill race. Mr. Holding got SLOC to give him \$13,000,000 so he could build one.

No matter that the place Holding wanted to build the downhill course ran right through the habitat of a rare Utah flower, an endangered species. Holding found a loophole. The little flower only grows on about 500 acres on the east side of the Wasatch Range on the slopes of Mt. Ogden. Since the species only lives in Utah and not in any other state, it isn't protected by federal laws, and Utah has no Endangered Species Protection Act of its own. So Mr. Holding got some dynamite and blew up 10% of the all land in the world where the little flower lived to carve himself an Olympic ski run into the mountain.

The long, narrow access road into Snowbasin was also a problem. Snowbasin is a pain in the butt to get to. Utah's taxpayers partly solved Mr. Holding's problem when the state built UT 167, a nice little highway whose only purpose is to cut about 10 minutes off the drive from Salt Lake City to Snowbasin, but that wasn't enough for Earl Holding. He wanted a new, shorter road from UT 167 to the ski resort, a new access road across National Forest land. The Forest Rangers said no can do, for it will destroy rare wet lands, and that is against federal law. Utah's ever oblig-

ing to big money Orrin Hatch to the rescue. Republican Hatch railroaded a pork barrel bill through Congress that gave Earl Holding the land he coveted for the road and, for good measure, had the American taxpayers pony up \$16,000,000 to pay for building the road.

When the law gets in Earl Holding's way, he gets his buddy Orrin to change the law.

It also turns out that Orrin Hatch owned some land along the new road. Sen. Hatch valued the land as worth less than \$15,000 before the new road went by. A year or so after Congress overturned the law and the Forest Service and gave Earl Holding his new road, Hatch sold his land for \$140,000.

But blowing up rare plants, changing laws, and paving over wet lands was only the start for Earl Holding. He also owns hotels. He owns Little America, the biggest hotel in Salt Lake City, and now he's building an even bigger one. The hotel occupancy rate in Salt Lake last October was an anemic 62%—there are too many rooms in the city—so Holding has a problem with his new hotel. Where is he going to find people to stay in it and pay for it? SLOC again to Holding's rescue. SLOC signed up Holding's new hotel as the official headquarters and home of the IOC for the Olympics.

Holding also wanted a hotel at Snowbasin, but there was no room for an Inn since the Forest Service owns most of the land at the base of the ski area. Having already engineered one land grab through his political toadies, Holding had no problem evicting the Forest Service from the government land he coveted.

Holding went out and bought some worthless forest land somewhere else and "traded" that acreage to the Forest Service for the now very valuable land at the base of Snowbasin. Hatch and Bennett arranged the deal. Although it wasn't said in so many words, you know the way that Hatch arranged the deal was by making it clear to the Forest Service that if they refused to go along with Holding's land grab, Hatch would legislate it.

The US Air Force had their one and only ski lodge on the land Holding took away from the taxpayers at the base of Snowbasin. After swiping the Air Force's land, Holding ordered the US Air Force to get out.

If you want to create a world class destination ski resort, you don't want your base area cluttered up with the low paid defenders of the nation, do you? No, you want it populated with jet set snow bunnies and big spenders, so to hell with the

Air Force.

The Air Force, having lost the Battle of Snowbasin—maybe the only battle the US Air Force ever lost—looked for a new home, and thought they found one in Park City. The BLM owns 200 acres in the middle of Park City, right next door to Deer Valley, and only a couple blocks from Park City Resort's Town Lift. What a great place for our new ski lodge, thought the Air Force.

Wait a minute, said Park City. We want that land for open space, but Park City worked out a land trade with the BLM and the Air Force to put the new Air Force ski lodge on some land Park City owned near Dan's grocery store. Everybody was happy. Orrin pocketed big bucks; Holding got the land and the roads and money he wanted, the Air Force found a new home, and Park City gained a new public park.

Now that deal looks doomed. Utah Republican Representative Jim Hansen has vetoed it, and it is not even in his district. He says Congress won't agree to trade 250 acres of steep hilly scrub oak and sage brush for two flat acres of prime downtown Park City property, so no deal.

Now think about that for a bit. Utah's Congressional delegation falls all over

itself to hoodwink Congress into handing Earl Holding everything he wants, even though all the environmental groups and the Forest Service oppose it, and it is against the law. But what happens when the US Air Force, the BLM, Park City, the environmentalists, and everybody else agree on a deal? That is no deal with Utah's Congressmen. Why is that? Is it because Park City didn't pay them off?

Park City put together a deal everybody likes, but Utah's Congressmen won't buy it. They say they can't sell it to Congress. Why not? Is it because Congress is finally sick of Utah's crooked Olympic dealings? Or is it because nobody paid enough to get Utah's Congressmen to go to work? Or maybe some of both? In any case, there is now an opportunity for Wasatch County.

A certain Steve Petersen, identified in the Tribune as Rep. Hansen's "district director", whatever that is, said the death of the deal everybody likes "may involve us looking for land further down in Wasatch County."

The Air Force needs a new home for its recreational ski lodge, and they have now cast an eye on Wasatch County. Seems this might be good for the County's anemic employment base; a new hotel in the county.

Wasatch County has an Economic Development Director, three County

Commissioners, a Planning Board, a Chamber of Commerce, and who knows what else, and all these gentlemen ought to get to work selling the Air Force on moving to Wasatch County.

I've got just place for the Air Force to put their new ski lodge—Soldier Hollow. Give Soldier Hollow to the Air Force. Give the land at Soldier Hollow to the Air Force for free, with the provision that the Air Force keep Soldier Hollow operating after the Olympics and allow the public to use it.

Another advantage in having the Air Force ski lodge here is that nobody in Heber Valley's tourist industry will have to worry about finding visitors to stay there, and none of our other hotels will lose any business. The Air Force will provide the customers, and they will tell their friends and relatives what a great place Heber Valley is, and that will bring more tourists to stay in the other hotels. Maybe not an economic boom, but a real smart deal.

We can bring jobs and tourists to Wasatch County, give the Air Force a new home where they can lick their wounds after losing the Battle of Snowbasin, and finally provide for the future of Soldier Hollow, all with one simple act. This is a good deal all around. Wanna bet the county leadership blows it? **W**

getaway finished at the JV competition pinning Kyle Nelson of Evanston in 1:54.

The Varsity Wrestlers worked hard to keep a hold of their current undefeated status beating the Red Devils 57-10. Coach Wade Discher commented that, though he was definitely pleased with the way his teams wrestled, "we have room for improvement." Coach Discher added, "We came out a little sluggish at first. Evanston is a tough team to wrestle. We like to go for pins, but they slowed us down a bit." As far as the overall season is concerned, Coach Discher is happy with his team's success. "We're doing real well. We're undefeated so far at 6 and 0 in duals and have won all three tournaments we were in."

The tournaments he is referring to are Layton, Reno and Uintah Tournaments of Champions. The varsity competition opened with Wasp Wrestler, Brett Smith (103) getting pinned by Carter Downing in 3:21. Next up was Ryan Bonner (112) who beat Red Devil Jeremy Vandenhuevan 10-7.

WHS's Kelly Horton (119) pinned Troy Shelton in 1:29; Luke Francis (125) beat Kirby Degraw 6-1; Sean Richins (130) lost to Red Devil Nathan Gerrad 8-16; Richie Cordova (135) beat Ryan Bodine 20-7; Shane Sweat (140) beat Kendall Barker 16-0; Mitch Morgan (145) pinned Jake Staley of Evanston in 2:38; WHS Senior Bart Klonizos (152) pinned Preston Nelsen in 3:30; Pete Julander (160) beat Josh Wright 14-0; Jon Carlisle (171) beat Joe Vincent 16-5;

straight through the net.



WHS senior guard Kris Hylton (#4) passes the ball to the outside from a tough spot.

In the last quarter, there were a few three-point plays by WHS bringing the final score of the game 54-22, with the Lady Wasps taking home the victory.

WHS Boys B-ball Gives Park City Miners A Run For Their Money

Shannon Taylor, Courier Staff

The Wasp Teams faced Park City on Wednesday, January 11. Though WHS played tough a tough game, the Miners still managed to steal victory in all four games.

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